

Irving, Griffis become Presiding Judges of Court of Appeals

March 4, 2011

Judge Tyree Irving of Madison and Judge T. Kenneth Griffis of Ridgeland have been appointed as Presiding Judges of the Mississippi Court of Appeals.

Court of Appeals Chief Judge L. Joseph Lee made the appointments Thursday, March 3, shortly after he was named administrative head of the Court of Appeals.

Judge Irving said, "I look forward to continuing the service I have provided as a judge to the citizens of the state since January 1999. I feel honored to have an opportunity to be a part of the best justice system in the world, designed to ensure fair and impartial justice for all people, no matter their economic, racial or religious status."

Judge Griffis said, "I am honored to have an opportunity to serve the citizens of Mississippi and the other judges of the Court of Appeals."

The Court of Appeals handles cases in three-judge panels, although all 10 judges of the court vote on decisions. Presiding judges preside over the panels during oral arguments and during the internal discussion of cases. The two presiding judges and the chief judge comprise the court's executive committee, which deals with administrative business of the Court of Appeals.

Judge Irving, 64, has served on the Court of Appeals since 1999. He and Chief Judge Lee are the court's longest serving members, both having taken office in January 1999. Judge Griffis, 49 has served on the Court of Appeals since January 2003.

Judge Irving is a past president and treasurer of the Magnolia Bar Association. Since September 2008, he has served on the American Bar Association's Judicial Division Standing Committee on Minorities in the Judiciary. The Committee acts as a catalyst to promote equal participation of minorities in the legal profession.

Judge Irving is chairman of the Mississippi Judicial Advisory Study Committee. He was appointed to the Study Committee in July 1999, and became its chair in September 2008. The Study Committee was created by the Legislature to examine issues of court organization and management and make recommendations to improve the administration of justice.

Judge Irving is a native of Greenwood. He was a solo practitioner in Greenwood before his election to the Court of Appeals. He is a former assistant U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Mississippi. In 1978, he became the first African American to serve as an assistant U.S. Attorney in Mississippi since Reconstruction.

Judge Irving taught school for four years in the Delta between his 1968 graduation from Jackson State College, now Jackson State University, and his enrollment in the University of Mississippi School of Law. In 1975, Judge Irving became the first African American attorney to serve as a law clerk for the Mississippi Supreme Court. He served as an Earl Warren Fellow intern with the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund in New York.

Judge Griffis practiced law in central Mississippi for more than 15 years before he was elected to the bench.

Judge Griffis serves as an adjunct professor at the Mississippi College School of Law. He previously taught government at Belhaven University and accounting at Meridian Community College.

Judge Griffis serves on the Mississippi Supreme Court's Advisory Committee on Rules, which studies and makes recommendations for changes in rules which govern the trial and appellate courts. He also serves on the Supreme Court's Committee on E-filing/Court Docket Management. The Committee was formed to study and recommend a uniform means to file court pleadings electronically and for uniform court docket management.

Judge Griffis has served as an officer or board member of the Mississippi Bar, the Lauderdale and Hinds County bar associations, and Jackson Young Lawyers Association.

He grew up in Meridian. He attended Meridian Community College and the Mississippi State University Meridian Branch. He earned accounting and law degrees from the University of Mississippi.

The Court of Appeals began hearing cases in January 1995. The Legislature created the intermediate appellate court to relieve a backlog of cases before the Supreme Court, and to speed up decisions. The Court of Appeals hears cases assigned by the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court has discretion over whether to review appeals of Court of Appeals decisions.

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